

Psychological Well-Being of Junior High School Students : Preliminary Study for Developing a Mental Health-Based School Counseling Model in Wetland Environments

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Submitted: 2025-12-29 Revised: 2026-04-28 Published: 2026-08-19 Keywords: Mental Health, Psychological Well-Being, School Counseling, Wetland Environment Copyright holder: © Author/s (2026) This article is under:  How to cite: Sulistiyana, S., Arsyad, M., & Ainah, N. (2026). Psychological Well-Being of Junior High School Students : Preliminary Study for Developing a Mental Health-Based School Counseling Model in Wetland Environments. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 8(2). https://doi.org/10.51214/002026081747000 Published by: Kuras Institute E-ISSN: 2656-1050	ABSTRACT: Psychological well-being is an important indicator of adolescent development, particularly among junior secondary school students living in riverbank areas with distinctive social and ecological challenges in wetland environments. This study used a descriptive qualitative survey design to describe the psychological well-being of junior high school students residing in riverbank communities in Banjarmasin City. The participants were 184 students from three junior high schools located along the riverbanks. Data were collected using a psychological well-being questionnaire based on Ryff's theoretical framework, covering six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The data were analyzed descriptively to identify general patterns and the dominant dimensions of students' psychological well-being. The results showed that most students (83.2%) had a moderate level of psychological well-being, while 15.2% were in the high category, and 1.6% were in the low category. The main weaknesses were observed in autonomy (52.7% low) and environmental mastery (56.0% low). In contrast, strengths appeared in personal growth (36.4% high) and purpose in life, with more than 60% of students falling within the moderate to high range. These findings indicate that although students have motivation and a sense of direction in life, they still face challenges related to independence and the management of their social and academic environments. The study highlights the need for school guidance and counseling services to implement a context-sensitive multitiered system of support (MTSS) that aligns with the ecological and cultural characteristics of riverbank communities in wetland environments.
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INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being is a crucial aspect of an individual's quality of life, including among students at the secondary school level. According to Ryff, psychological well-being consists of several dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (as cited in Tasema, 2018). Achieving psychological well-being during adolescence contributes to happiness, positive mental health, and the capacity for optimal self-development (Megawati & Yohanes, 2016). However, numerous studies indicate that most adolescents in Indonesia fall within the moderate or low categories of psychological well-being (Prabowo, 2016; Riyana, 2022). This condition signals an urgent need for systematic promotive and preventive interventions in schools.

Adolescent mental health has become a global concern. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) reports that one in seven adolescents worldwide experiences mental health problems, with half of all cases beginning before the age of 14. National data in Indonesia also reveal alarming

figures. The Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey ([I-NAMHS, 2022](#)) found that 34.9% of adolescents experience symptoms of mental disorders, while only 2.6% access psychological or counseling services ([Kompas, 2023](#)). This situation is exacerbated by social stigma, low mental health literacy, and limited school counseling services.

Junior high school students living in riverbank and wetland areas, such as those in Banjarmasin and surrounding regions, face particularly complex challenges. Geographical conditions prone to flooding, limited educational infrastructure, and socioeconomic pressures increase the risk of mental health problems. Local studies in South Kalimantan indicate low levels of mental health literacy among students and limited teacher capacity to provide psychosocial support ([Radar Banjarmasin, 2023](#); [UIN Antasari, 2023](#)). Cases of suicide and student violence further highlight the limitations of early detection and school-based intervention systems.

International studies emphasize the role of schools as strategic settings for mental health promotion. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs have been shown to improve social-emotional skills, reduce problem behaviors, and enhance academic achievement ([Durlak et al., 2011](#); [Cipriano et al., 2023](#)). School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMHS) are also effective in improving access to care, preventing psychosocial problems, and building adolescent resilience ([Richter et al., 2022](#)). Unfortunately, in Indonesia, school guidance and counseling services remain largely administrative and are not yet fully integrated into educational management systems ([Aslamiah et al., 2023](#); [Arsyad, 2025](#)).

In this context, a preliminary study mapping the psychological well-being of junior high school students in riverbank areas is essential. Such mapping provides a foundation for designing a contextually appropriate, mental health-based school counseling model for wetland environments. This model is expected to function not only curatively but also promotively and preventively, in line with a whole-school approach that positions mental health as an integral component of school management ([Fazel et al., 2014](#); [Greenberg, 2023](#)).

Understanding students' psychological well-being requires a context-sensitive perspective, particularly for junior high school students living in riverbank and wetland environments. Such areas present distinctive ecological and social challenges, including flood vulnerability, limited educational infrastructure, and socioeconomic pressures, which may affect students' autonomy, environmental mastery, and social adjustment. Although schools are widely recognized as strategic settings for mental health promotion and prevention, empirical studies that specifically map the psychological well-being of junior high school students in riverbank contexts remain limited. Therefore, a preliminary assessment of students' psychological well-being is essential as a foundational step for designing school guidance and counseling services that are responsive to local ecological and cultural conditions rather than relying on generalized intervention models.

Based on this rationale, the present study aims to describe the psychological well-being of junior high school students residing in riverbank areas of Banjarmasin City using a descriptive qualitative survey approach. Specifically, the study seeks to identify overall levels of psychological well-being and to examine dominant strengths and weaknesses across its core dimensions as conceptualized in Ryff's framework. The findings are expected to provide empirical groundwork for the development of a contextually grounded, mental health-based school counseling model that aligns with the ecological and sociocultural characteristics of wetland communities and supports the implementation of a multitiered system of support (MTSS) within schools.

METHOD

Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative survey design aimed at describing the psychological well-being of junior high school students residing in riverbank and wetland communities. The design was selected to provide a systematic depiction of students' psychological

well-being profiles within their specific ecological and sociocultural context. Data were collected using a structured psychological well-being questionnaire; however, the analysis remained descriptive in nature, focusing on identifying general patterns and dominant strengths and weaknesses across the dimensions of psychological well-being. The study did not seek to examine causal relationships or test hypotheses, but rather to map students' psychological well-being as a basis for contextualized guidance and counseling interventions.

Sample and Procedure

The research sample consisted of 184 junior high school students drawn from three public junior high schools located in riverbank areas of Banjarmasin City, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. The schools were selected purposively based on their geographical location in wetland and riverbank environments, which are characterized by periodic flooding, limited educational infrastructure, and distinct sociocultural conditions. Students were selected using a total sampling technique from the student population in the selected schools, ensuring that the data reflected the psychological well-being of students within these contexts.

Instrument

Data were collected using a Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire developed based on Ryff's (1989) theoretical model of psychological well-being. The instrument measured six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. The questionnaire consisted of 36 items arranged on a Likert scale. Prior to data collection, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability. The results of the reliability test yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.906, indicating excellent internal consistency and supporting the reliability of the instrument for measuring students' psychological well-being in the study context.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques. Students' total psychological well-being scores were categorized into low, moderate, and high levels based on predetermined score intervals. In addition to overall categorization, dimensional analysis was performed to examine the distribution of students across the six psychological well-being dimensions. The results were presented as frequency distributions and percentages to facilitate interpretation and to identify dominant patterns, strengths, and areas of vulnerability. This analytical approach was intended to provide an empirical foundation for developing a mental health-based school counseling model tailored to wetland and riverbank environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the data collected in this study, the following results were obtained. The results of the study indicate that the majority of students (83.2%) were classified in the moderate of psychological well-being. This suggests that most students have a moderate level of psychological well-being and have not yet reached an optimal level. They are generally able to manage themselves and their environment; however, limitations remain in aspects such as self-acceptance, autonomy, and social relationships. A smaller proportion of students (15.2%) were classified in the high category, indicating relatively higher levels of psychological well-being, particularly in areas related to autonomy, environmental mastery, social relationships, and life goals. These students tend to be more resilient and have the potential to serve as peer-support models within the school. Only 1.6% of students were classified in the low category, indicating potential difficulties in managing stress, building positive relationships, or developing a clear sense of direction in life. This group may require

greater attention through appropriate counseling interventions. These findings are consistent with previous research by Sulistiyana et al. (2024), which found that most junior high school students in riverbank areas had moderate levels of psychological well-being, with weaknesses in self-acceptance and autonomy but relatively stronger purpose in life.

Table 1. Distribution of Psychological Well-Being Categories of Junior High School Students in the Riverbank Area of Banjarmasin City

Psychological Well-Being				
Category			Frequency	Percentage
Low	X < 96		3	1,63%
Medium	96 - 155		153	83,15%
High	> 156		28	15,22%
Total			184	100%

Table 2. Psychological Well-Being Dimension Data (N = 184 students)

Dimension	Low	Medium	High
Autonomy	97 (52.7%)	70 (38.0%)	17 (9.2%)
Environmental Mastery	103 (56.0%)	76 (41.3%)	5 (2.7%)
Personal Growth	79 (42.9%)	38 (20.7%)	67 (36.4%)
Positive Relationships	72 (39.1%)	51 (27.7%)	61 (33.2%)
Life Purpose	71 (38.6%)	60 (32.6%)	53 (28.8%)
Self-Acceptance	74 (40.2%)	60 (32.6%)	50 (27.2%)

The data presented in Table 2 illustrate a differentiated profile of psychological well-being across its six dimensions among junior high school students living in riverbank areas. Regarding autonomy, more than half of the students (52.7%) were classified in the low category, while only 9.2% were classified in the high category. This pattern suggests that a substantial proportion of students experience limited independence in decision-making and may be susceptible to social influence, indicating constraints in self-directed functioning. A similar and more pronounced trend was observed in environmental mastery, where 56.0% of students fell into the low category and only 2.7% were classified in the high category. These findings indicate that students may experience difficulties in managing academic demands, daily responsibilities, and their broader school environments, reflecting challenges in adaptive functioning within contexts characterized by ecological and social challenges.

In contrast, personal growth emerged as a relative strength, with 36.4% of students categorized as high, representing the highest proportion of high scores across all dimensions. This suggests that despite environmental constraints, many students maintain an orientation toward self-development and learning. Consistently, the purpose in life dimension showed predominantly moderate to high levels (61.4% combined), indicating that most students possess a sense of direction and future orientation. The relational and intrapersonal dimensions demonstrated mixed patterns. For positive relationships with others, one-third of students (33.2%) were classified in the high category, while 39.1% were classified in the low category, indicating uneven social connectedness. Similarly, self-acceptance revealed that although 27.2% of students showed high levels, a considerable proportion (40.2%) were classified in the low category.

Overall, these findings indicate that students' psychological well-being is relatively stronger in future orientation and personal growth, but weaker in autonomy and environmental mastery. This dimensional imbalance directly addresses the study objective by identifying specific areas of vulnerability and relative strength, thereby providing empirical grounding for the development of

context-sensitive, mental health–based school counseling interventions in riverbank and wetland environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the psychological well-being of junior high school students living in riverbank areas is predominantly situated at a moderate level. This condition suggests that students generally possess adequate adaptive capacities but have not yet achieved optimal psychological functioning. According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being reflects the partial fulfillment of developmental tasks, in which individuals can function adequately yet remain vulnerable to environmental stressors. In riverbank and wetland environments, such vulnerability may be influenced by ecological uncertainty, limited infrastructure, and socioeconomic pressures. Adolescents growing up in such contexts often face cumulative stress that may affect emotional regulation and self-efficacy (Ungar, 2011). The moderate level of well-being observed in this study aligns with previous findings on Indonesian adolescents, who commonly report similar patterns of psychological well-being due to structural and psychosocial constraints (Prabowo, 2016; Riyana, 2022). This condition highlights the importance of understanding psychological well-being not as an individual trait alone, but as an outcome embedded within broader environmental systems. Consequently, student well-being in riverbank areas should be interpreted as a dynamic interaction between personal resources and contextual challenges.

A prominent finding of this study is the low level of autonomy among students, indicating limited independence in decision-making and potential susceptibility to social pressure. Within Ryff's (1989) framework, autonomy represents the capacity to self-govern and resist external control, which is a critical developmental task during adolescence. Low autonomy suggests that students may struggle to assert personal values and regulate behavior independently, particularly in socially interconnected environments such as riverbank communities. Ecological theories of development emphasize that adolescents in challenging environments often prioritize conformity and social survival over self-determination (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This condition may restrict opportunities for identity exploration and psychological growth. Counseling literature highlights that autonomy can be fostered through intentional school-based interventions that promote self-reflection, assertiveness, and decision-making skills (Green, 1994). Without systematic support, students may internalize dependency patterns that persist into adulthood. Therefore, autonomy deficits observed in this study represent a significant psychological risk factor requiring targeted intervention.

Similarly, low environmental mastery emerged as a dominant weakness, reflecting students' potential difficulties in managing academic demands and social responsibilities. Environmental mastery refers to an individual's ability to effectively navigate and shape their surroundings to meet personal needs (Ryff, 1989). In flood-prone riverbank areas, environmental instability may influence students' perception of control and predictability. Research on adolescents in disadvantaged settings indicates that chronic exposure to environmental stress reduces perceived competence and increases learned helplessness (Evans & Kim, 2013). Students may experience school as an overwhelming space rather than a supportive environment for growth. School-based mental health frameworks emphasize the importance of creating predictable, structured, and emotionally safe learning environments to support students' psychological functioning (Weist et al., 2014). When environmental mastery remains low, students may be more vulnerable to academic disengagement and emotional distress. Thus, strengthening environmental mastery should be a core objective of school counseling and mental health programs in wetland contexts.

Despite these vulnerabilities, the study identified notable strengths in personal growth and purpose in life. High levels of personal growth indicate that many students retain motivation for self-improvement and openness to learning. According to Ryff and Singer (2008), personal growth

reflects a proactive orientation toward development and is a key indicator of psychological resilience. Purpose in life further reinforces this resilience by providing students with meaning and direction, even amid adversity. Greenberg (2023) argues that purpose functions as a psychological anchor that buffers stress and enhances motivation. Empirical evidence shows that adolescents with a strong sense of purpose demonstrate higher academic engagement and emotional stability (Damon et al., 2003). These strengths suggest that students possess internal resources that can be leveraged in intervention design. Programs such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) have been shown to amplify these protective factors by integrating meaning-making, goal setting, and emotional skills into daily schooling (Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, the presence of these strengths provides an important foundation for mental health-oriented educational practices.

From a broader educational management perspective, these findings underscore the need for a school system that explicitly integrates mental health into its organizational framework. Schools in riverbank areas cannot rely solely on academic instruction to support student development. Conley (1993) emphasizes that sustainable school improvement requires systemic restructuring focused on student well-being rather than administrative efficiency alone. The Multitiered System of Support (MTSS) offers a comprehensive framework to address diverse levels of psychological need through universal, targeted, and intensive interventions (Kern et al., 2024). Such a system allows schools to respond both to widespread moderate vulnerabilities and to individual cases requiring specialized support. Tyler (1988) further conceptualizes schools as social organizations embedded within ecological and cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of contextual responsiveness. In wetland environments, school leadership must adopt a collaborative and adaptive management approach involving counselors, teachers, families, and community stakeholders. By aligning mental health services with local ecological realities, schools can function as resilient systems that promote long-term psychological well-being among students.

Implication

The findings of this study have important implications for school practice and educational management, particularly in riverbank and wetland contexts. The coexistence of moderate overall psychological well-being with pronounced weaknesses in autonomy and environmental mastery suggests that schools must move beyond reactive or remedial counseling toward a proactive, system-wide mental health approach. School guidance and counseling services should be repositioned as strategic components of school management, with a strong emphasis on fostering students' self-regulation, independent decision-making, and adaptive skills. At the programmatic level, these findings support the adoption of a multitiered system of support (MTSS) that integrates universal preventive interventions, targeted group support for at-risk students, and intensive individualized services. Furthermore, the presence of strengths in personal growth and purpose in life indicates that interventions should adopt a strengths-based orientation, leveraging students' existing motivation and future orientation as entry points for mental health promotion. From a management perspective, effective implementation requires supportive school leadership, cross-sector collaboration among teachers, counselors, families, and local communities, and alignment of mental health initiatives with the ecological and sociocultural realities of riverbank environments. Collectively, these implications underscore the need for context-responsive and sustainable school management approaches that promote students' psychological well-being in environmentally vulnerable settings.

Limitation and Recommendation

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the use of a descriptive qualitative survey design limits the ability to infer causal relationships between contextual factors and students' psychological well-being. Second, the reliance on self-

report questionnaire data may introduce response bias, particularly given students' varying levels of self-awareness and susceptibility to social desirability bias. Third, the sample was restricted to junior high school students from three schools in riverbank areas of Banjarmasin, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other wetland or non-riverbank contexts. Additionally, the study did not incorporate qualitative data such as interviews or observations that could have provided deeper insight into students' lived experiences. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to employ mixed-method or longitudinal designs to capture developmental changes and contextual influences on psychological well-being over time. Expanding the sample to include diverse ecological settings and integrating multiple informants, such as teachers, counselors, and parents, would enhance the comprehensiveness of findings. Furthermore, intervention-based studies examining the effectiveness of mental health-oriented school counseling models, particularly within a multitiered system of support (MTSS), are strongly recommended to translate descriptive findings into evidence-based practice.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings indicate that the psychological well-being of junior high school students living in riverbank areas is generally at a moderate level but not yet optimal. Weaknesses are evident in autonomy and environmental mastery, while strengths are found in personal growth and purpose in life. These results highlight the need for a contextually grounded, mental health-based counseling model using a multitiered approach in schools located in wetland areas. Such a model should be environmentally responsive and grounded in effective collaboration within the school community to support the research objective of promoting students' psychological well-being in riverbank and wetland contexts.

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